

Dear Chairman Powell and Commissioners,

As a citizen who wants to be informed about the political and electoral issues that affect my life, I am gravely worried, not only about the lack of informative television programming, but the prevalence of disinformation on the networks, including cable.

Local public affairs programming is virtually non-existent--constituting less than one half of 1% of all local programming. More than half of news broadcasts prior to the 2002 elections did not include a single campaign story. Our democracy is at risk when many Americans don't know basic facts about the candidates or the issues, as was the case in the 2000 elections--and even more so when citizens hear only spin and public relations fodder.

Since broadcasters have clearly failed in their obligation to serve the public interest, the FCC should define meaningful public interest requirements that include local civic and electoral affairs programming. At a minimum, broadcasters should air three hours per week of local civic and electoral affairs programming, with at least two hours devoted to substantive election coverage in the six weeks prior to Election Day. This should not be gathered from news releases, but from vigorous and dispassionate investigative reporting.

As the elections approach, a well-functioning democracy demands that citizens have access to a diversity of opinions and voices on the choices confronting us. This is now a critical issue.

Sincerely,

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